LETTERS

FROM THE LIBRARY OF
ADDRESSED
Rev. William C. White, D. D.

To An Inquirer.

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BY
Rev. H. H. HAWES, D. D.

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LETTERS

ADDRESSED

TO AN INQUIRER.

BY

REV. H. H. HAWES.

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MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

My Dear Sir:

Your condition, as represented in your letter to me, is that of very many others. Therefore I take this public way of answering you, hoping thus, not only to benefit you, but them also. What you say, they would also say. The difficulties in your way are the same by which they are also troubled.

And now I beg that you will read patiently and prayerfully what I may say. I am conscious of being responsible for my teachings. Therefore be assured they will be given with care. First of all, I must tell you candidly that your mind is *full of misunderstandings* or rather *misconceptions* of what is needful for you. You speak of your "dead soul," and of your "hope that God will revive it with spiritual life in His own good time." Now I note this expression very attentively. And if your letter truly represents your feelings, I am warranted in telling you *that you have no*

"*dead soul.*" The motions of spiritual life appear clearly. What you have to do is to *recognize* this fact, and nourish that life. Do not think I am saying too much. And do not fear to admit the fact which exists. The testimony of facts is positive and reliable. You may trust it fully. What many sinners really need is, not further and startling manifestations of God's dealings with them, but attention to what He has actually done and is doing in and for them. Please read that sentence over again, and fix it in your mind. In your case, the clear evidences are your own admissions, as follows: "I have sought Christ." "The greatest desire of my life is to be a pure Christian in heart and deed." "I desire Christianity above all things." "I feel that an assurance that God loves me, that I am in His service and pleasing Him, would be the greatest joy to me." Many other expressions occur which I will not repeat.

Now see how your case stands. You say that after praying for the Holy Spirit, you do not think He has come to you. But you are dissatisfied with sin, and with yourself as a

sinner. Your own words testify of a strong desire to be saved from the guilt and power of sin; and to become a true follower of Jesus Christ. Think of this. Do you never ask where all these feelings came from? They are not natural to you. You did not, could not, produce them. No one can do it. If left to yourself, you would never have experienced them. A dead body has no care or feeling. A soul "dead in trespasses and sins" has no motion of spiritual life. A dead body cannot produce feeling and motion in itself. Can you not appreciate this?

What then are these feelings of which you speak? Evidently the Holy Spirit *has come* to *you*, and imparted at least some spiritual life. The pulse may throb faintly. The heart may beat but softly. The breath may only stir the softest down upon a feather. But with only such evidences, we say "the body has life." It may not be strong, hearty life; it may not be what we desire. But it will be, after being nourished and cared for. So the beginnings of spiritual life may as yet be far short of what we desire. What we need to know is whether there be any life at all. Any

motion or sign of life is hopeful. Cherish what you have, and it will strengthen. If your heart has any spiritual desires and longings looking toward Christ, bless God for so much, and wait on Him for more. His Spirit is with you. Do not deny His presence. Attend to His leadings. As yet, your evidences may seem to you defective, and your consciousness unsatisfactory. But in the possession of such feelings as you express, there seems to be good reason for concluding *that you have been led to Christ*, and that your real trouble is in misunderstanding the Holy Spirit's work. To this point I would direct your thoughts.

DEMAND FOR "EXPERIENCES."

My Dear Sir:

In my last letter I spoke of your mistake in supposing that you are destitute of spiritual life. Of course we are thus destitute by nature. But this truth only makes it clearer that you are not in such condition now, when you speak and feel as one who is quickened. I know it will be hard for you to let go the notion that spiritual life is to be known only by certain strange experiences. But when you see some grand old oak that has stood the battling of a hundred winters, will you deny that it was once a tender shoot which an infant's hand could crush? If I show you such a shoot now, growing from one of its acorns, will you deny life to this germ because it is not yet what the oak is? Certainly not. You do not demand startling experiences to convince you of the presence of life anywhere else, except in your own soul. An infant has life as truly as a grown man.

You admit this, though the infant does not spring at once to man's estate, and lacks ability to be much that the grown man is. Now can you not understand that you may have spiritual life, though not possessing it in the same degree as the old, tried, experienced Christian? There must be a *beginning* from which all life must grow towards maturity. And this is as true in spiritual, as in any other things. What did the Psalmist say? "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God." The *planting* comes before the growing.

And life cannot be as large and full at this stage as when it is matured by time and culture. So too we read of "babes" in Christ. Then we find that these are to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ until they come to the fulness of the stature of men in Him. I say then, if you find your will, heart, reason and conscience all going over to Christ, you cannot deny that here is the fact of spiritual feeling. And as spiritual feeling does not belong to a "dead soul," you must be possessed of spiritual life. Cast out the notion that you know what sort of experiences you must

nave. And of one thing, especially, think well;—*you are not a heathen.* The Gospel has not come to you now for the first time, so as to appear novel, and produce novel experiences. You are the child of Christian parents. You cannot remember the time when you were not surrounded by religious teachings and influences. Therefore how can you expect to find things new and strange in your dealings with Christianity? Impressions have had time to fasten and grow upon you gradually, rather than suddenly and sensibly. *And you have no right* to suppose or expect that you are to be *surprised* into being a Christian. Misunderstandings on this point have done much harm. I beg you to give weight to these considerations. Evidently your *will* is turned towards Christian life. This is important. But how did this come to be? You do not know. When did it come to be? You do not know. Well, no matter. There is the *fact.* That is what you do know. But do you not also know that you could not change your own will? It is your will which governs you. By nature it sets you *against* God, and against Christ's service. To turn

it to God and serving Christ, is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a great change, and is essential. Now if you find by consciousness that you are desiring to do God's will, and would find delight, as you say, in doing it, this is direct evidence of spiritual life imparted to you. It is not of your own begetting. It is the gift of God. Can you not trust Him to carry on the good work which He thus begins?

VIEWS OF SIN.

My Dear Sir:

I note next your doubts and fears as to your attitude towards sin. You doubt your ability to recognize or appreciate "entirely" the justice of God in inflicting eternal punishment upon you, when you feel conscious that you desire and have tried to submit yourself to Him. But no one among us can fully grasp the idea of sin's utter hatefulness and guilt in the sight of God. *If we could see it as He does, we would fully approve whatever course He may take towards it.* Here we can hold only the right theory. But the *entirely right feeling* we cannot have, because we are unable to know all of sin as it is before our infinitely holy God. The doctrine of eternal punishment is true and right. You and all others will see this plainly in due time. I will not argue the matter here. I will only say it will be time enough for you to discuss this matter in its personal bearings,

when God proposes to inflict such a doom upon you. That which we now lack is a just and true sense of the magnitude of sin's guilt. And this we can have only as we increase in holiness. A will and heart *completely sanctified* will accord entirely with the judgment of God. But as your case stands, the *wrong* of sin—the *sinfulness* of it, seems to strike you forcibly. With such a beginning, you will reach right conclusions when the time comes. God is now proposing, not to destroy, but to save you. He is not asking you to sit in judgment upon what will be right for Him to do towards lost souls. But He is asking you, the sinner, not to be lost. He is calling you to the Saviour of sinners. Yet you also say, you fear you have not enough conviction of sin. Well, how much is enough? God does not answer such a question in such terms as are sometimes used among men. He only knows how guilty a sinner is, and He is merciful in not unveiling everything as it is to your gaze. This would drive you to despair. But remember, even while this is true, He is offering to save you. If He has not marked the degree of convic-

tion, why should you attempt to do so? Do not give yourself difficulties where God has made none. Conviction is sufficient, not when you are satisfied with all your feelings towards sin, but when you find yourself enough dissatisfied with it, to desire truly and sincerely deliverance from both its guilt and power. And this is just the feeling which you confess. You say, "The greatest desire of my life is to be a pure Christian in heart and deed." You confess that you sorrow over your sinfulness. It distresses and disturbs you that you are not good and holy, as God demands. And do you not also tell me that you find yourself unable to perfect your life? What are you to do, then? One thing only. With all your wants and deficiencies, give your unruly self over to the keeping of Christ. In His school, you will have to strive and study long and hard, before you will feel that real spiritual strength is increasing upon you. You can come to Him as you are. Indeed, there is no other way in which you can come. He is to improve you. He only can do it. And you will find that as you follow Him, convictions of sin will

steadily increase. As you get nearer to Him, sin will appear more hateful and repulsive. But you will never know how to feel as you should towards sin, until you "see Him as He is," and are made like Him. Begin therefore with what you have. For Christ will perfect it as needful. He has begun your education. Trust Him to complete it.

THE SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE.

My Dear Sir:

One of your chief difficulties seems to be the feeling that you are not accepted of Christ. You argue that you are not, upon the grounds that you "do not feel pure by the purifying of His atonement"—and "never felt accepted." Now think what a mistake you are making. What does Christ say? Does He promise to *save* you, or to *give you a full sense of acceptance* when you have come to Him? To save you, certainly! And this, not a satisfactory sense of acceptance, is the thing upon which your soul is to rest. Fix you thoughts upon Jesus, not upon yourself. Remember why He was named Jesus: Matt. i: 21, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Remember, also, why He came to earth: Matt. xviii: 11, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." Were *you* "lost?" Then He came

to save you. He did not come to condemn sinners. God did not send Him to condemn but to save. Jno. iii : 17. Now then, do not pervert the Scriptures. Fix your hope upon Christ, and upon Him only. Your sense of acceptance is to grow, not out of self-satisfaction, or even any feelings of assurance that you are accepted; but out of your receiving and resting upon *Jesus Christ alone* as all your hope and all your salvation. If you have accepted Christ, be sure He has also accepted you. The evidence is not in you, but in Him and His word of truth. Have you a friend in whose honor and truth you believe? Now, then, suppose he makes you an offer of great good, if you will accept it. Can you not tell whether or not you accept it? Certainly. But what about your *friend's* feelings in the matter? You do not ask for further assurances that *he* accepts you in your acceptance of his offer. You believe him to be honest and true. His word once given is enough for you. You know that what he offered is yours, just as soon as you consented to take it. It may be thousands of miles away yet

you know it is yours, though you now *have no evidence in your senses of feeling, taste,* etc., to show that it is yours. You know your friend will be true to his word. Now I ask: Is not the word of Christ as worthy of faith? Must He give you some new proofs that He is true, after offering you salvation? Though the evidence of His truth be not in your consciousness, or be not plain in sensible tokens, you should believe that what He offers is now yours, *because you have taken Him at His word, and accepted it.* When you believe God's word, and act upon it as upon any other word that you believe, in this is your surety of acceptance. For He is true and faithful! Your trouble has been in *mistaking the evidences of your acceptance.* You lack *assurance* of faith. But take God at His word now, and be satisfied with this for the present. In following Him, time will prove more and more how worthy of trust His word is. Thus the sense of acceptance will grow upon you. Satan wants you to seek rest in "signs and wonders." But the word of truth says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

FAITH IN EMOTIONS.

My Dear Sir:

I observe another difficulty in your way. You have waited to be exercised and moved by certain emotions. You have desired to have the testimony of your senses, as a reason for believing yourself in a saved condition. What a happy hour it will be when the sensations of regeneration thrill your heart; when your conscious soul seems standing in the very presence of your Saviour, and your ears do not mistake the greeting—"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace." Yes, it will be pleasant and joyous, if it ever comes to pass. But as Christ's messenger who must account for his work, I would not, for all the world, tell you that you cannot have a hope of salvation until it comes thus. Be sober and thoughtful about this matter. Remember, you are to be guided by what God reveals in His word, which is His will for your salvation. Do you recall any teaching of

that word which authorizes the idea of being so wrought upon? You read the calls to "Rejoice." But notice also that the whole exhortation is, not rejoice in yourself, or your frames and sighs—but "*Rejoice in the Lord.*" He is the one object of your faith. And here, I remember you spoke of not being able to exercise "faith in your prayers." God forbid that you should. May He effectually destroy all faith in yourself, and in anything that you can be or do of yourself. May He also save you from all faith in "signs and wonders" and feelings. I know you are thinking of certain experiences which others boast of, or which, perchance, some ungarded teacher has led you to expect. But remember, God has not prescribed the degree or extent of emotions which you are to have. Do not risk your hope upon *sentiment.* Many are doing this. If they feel joyful and buoyant, they imagine all is well. Now let me assure you, that your salvation does not depend upon any such exercises. They have really nothing to do with your acceptance. If they are granted to you, this *may* be a matter of thanksgiving,

though I doubt it. If they are not granted, the *finished work of Christ* remains as perfect without as with them. Rest only upon this, I beseech you. Have you not seen many who for a time, under peculiar influences, seemed ready to

> "Vie with Gabriel while he sings,
> In notes almost Divine."

But in a little while, they were back in their old sin-haunts again, and were worse than before. Why was this? Because they gave their faith to *experiences* instead of Christ, and built upon *sentiment* instead of *principle*. I do not say that no one may be greatly exercised. Much depends upon temperament and other circumstances. It is very seldom the case that anything affects two persons precisely in the same way. Make full allowance for this. Remember also that the Spirit will give His witness *as it pleases Him to give it*, not as it pleases the sinner to ask it.—Take this witness therefore as He gives it to you, and never try to make the experience of some one else, the rule of your own. You have wanted to find something pleasant in *self*. If you could find it, you would stake

your salvation upon it. Therefore your loving God has withheld it from you. Be assured of what I now say:—Better than any joyous feeling, is the *convinced will*, which, recognizing truth and duty, goes forward to *the service of obedience to Christ.* Better than triumphant songs is the *convinced, enlightened conscience*, which renounces the wrong, and strives for the right. Better than exultants shouts, is *the pleading cry of repentance* over the consciousness of sin. These are for "casting down imaginations, * * * and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." By these, the Spirit strengthens and deepens His work in the soul. He is now showing you your vileness of heart, that He may cause you to trust nothing but the merits of Christ.

"DUTY BEFORE PLEASURE."

My Dear Sir:

I have reserved for this letter, your trouble, expressed thus: "I do not feel that I am a Christian. I am conscious of want of love to God, and this assures me that I am not a Christian." Yet you say: "Assurance that God loved me; that I was in His service and pleasing Him, would be the greatest joy to me." And is it indeed true that you do not believe God? Or do you forget what He has done and said to prove His love for you? Your Bible is full of most earnest assurances that God loves you. If "actions speak louder than words," and you want these signs, then remember Calvary! The atonement of Christ is the very highest proof that God loves you. Yet there is one more. Look at your own self. Why have you been spared so long? Why are you not this moment in perdition? Why are you not cold, hardened and careless, in-

stead of being thoughtful and inquiring? *This is all because God loves you.* Were I to do some great thing to prove my love for you, you would believe in it. You would not demand that I should come to you, and add fresh evidences. You would know and feel my love for you, by what I *had* done. If you believe such witness of men, is not the witness of God greater? No; you are mistaken. You do know and believe that God loves you. You cannot think of what He has done and is doing, and still doubt. The very fact that He has stirred your heart to consciousness of sin and desire to be saved, is fresh proof. Did He not love you, you would not now be asking, "What must I do to be saved?" But further—How can you expect "assurance" that you are "in His service and pleasing Him," when you are not? You *cannot* feel that you are in His service *so long as you refuse to enter it?* You *cannot* feel that you are "pleasing Him," so long as you refuse to believe His word, and thus continue in the attitude of rejecting Jesus Christ. Remember the principle which Christ declared in Jno. vii : 17. "If any man

will do His (God's) will, he shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God." Now it is God's will that you shall confess Jesus Christ before men. *If you are not doing His will, how can you expect Him to give you "assurance" that He loves you and that you are "in His service and pleasing Him"?* Think of this. You are not pleasing God as long as you continue in the attitude of rejecting Christ! Therefore God withholds from you the assurance which you want to obtain. One of our hymns says:

> "Let us obey; we then shall know,
> Shall feel our sins forgiven."

This is duty which must be done, let the results be to us what they may! Jer. xlii: 6, "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God: * * * that it may be well with us, when we obey the Lord our God." Christ said, Jno. xv: 10, 14. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Do you not see how all this bears upon your case? If you want "assurance" of being in God's service, enter it at once.

Only when you are in His service, can you know that you are in it. Only when you do what He commands, can you know that you are pleasing Him. Think of this.

As to the trouble of not feeling that you are a Christian, I ask: How do you know that you do not feel so? What is it to feel that you are a Christian? You answer by talking of want of pleasant experiences, lack of love towards God, etc. But I answer in quite another way. You will never in this world find a Christian who will say, "I am not wanting in love to God. *Among them all, there is not one who loves God as he should.* This is one of our troubles. We try to correct it. We make slow work. Yet we are trying. We are, and to the end must be, striving and praying for better things. Thus you see, if consciousness of not loving God enough is evidence, then there are no Christians at all. It is apt to be here, as in other matters. I ask myself: "Do I love my friend?" Consciousness may not respond very freely in answer, as I sit so coolly examining myself. But let *occasion call* for my love. Then the answer comes quick and strong in my ac-

tions, as I spring forward to show that I do love him. And what did Christ say? "If ye love Me, keep my commandments. He that heareth my words and doeth them, he it is that loveth Me." He would rather have your *actions* than your best words. And how is it that your heart is so drawn towards God's service, and so desirous of serving Him, if you have no love for Him? Evidently you do care for God. And the question should be, not "Do I love God as I should?" but "Do I love God at all?" I leave you this to think upon for the present. In my next letter I will speak of Christian feelings, and so conclude.

CHRISTIAN FEELINGS.

My Dear Sir:

When you say, "I do not feel that I am a Christian," you doubtless refer to what you consider the want of proper evidences—rather, evidences which you think needful. Does it not occur to you, that here also you may be mistaken? Certainly no one can rightly feel that he is a Christian, who is not. But what does the Christian feel? If you could see his heart, you would discover there such feelings as —

(1). *Conviction of Sin.* He never gets rid of this. He never feels it as much as he should. Every day, even to the end of life, he feels "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Every day he has need to pray — "God be merciful to me a sinner.

(2). *Helplessness against Sin.* "For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do."

(3). *True and continued desire* to be deliv-

ered from the guilt and power of sin. "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death." It is hateful, troublesome, and gives sorrow.

(4). *Repentance for Sin.* Not necessarily tears, and strong emotions. Rather, clear views of sinfulness; sincere regret over it; earnest resolves and efforts to renounce it, because you see and feel that it is displeasing to God!

(5). *Warfare against Sin.* "For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." Every day the battle must be renewed. He says:

> "Fight on my soul, till death
> Shall bring thee to thy God."

(6). Inability to do as he would. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary, the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Yet he continues trying.

(7). He has no hope, no goodness, no strength in himself. Without Christ, he is utterly lost and undone. "I am crucified

with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." He has neither hope nor dependence outside of this.

Such are some, and the *chief*, of the Christian feelings. A Christian will find it hard to get beyond being described *as a repenting sinner following* Jesus.

Now I ask, is this too exalted a confession for you to make? Are these feelings to which you cannot attain? Are they not your precise feelings this moment? Rapturous exercises are seldom known to the great majority of Christians. *God has not asked them. They are not faith.* Why then do you think you must have them in order to feel like a Christian? Away with "imaginations." Bring "every thought *into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*" If you can only begin with, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," so are Christian faith and dependence expressed. From this beginning you are to grow, until by the grace and Spirit of your Lord, you can die saying, "I

know whom I have believed." In that hour you will believe less in yourself than you ever did, and Christ will be more "all and in all" than He ever was. *Begin* therefore by trusting Christ. *Continue*, by trusting Christ. *End*, by trusting Christ. When you obey God's call in so doing, you have the only right possible, to feel that you are a Christian. Get rid of the notion that a Christian is a good and holy man. He is simply *a sinner in the hands of his Saviour.* Can you not be such as that? The sick man is in his physician's hands *to be cured.* The sinner is in the hands of Christ, the Great Physician, *to be saved from and cured of sin.* Can you not rest here? If the act be needed, get down on your knees, and give yourself to Jesus Christ. You have need to take a *decisive step*, more than to receive further signs of God's presence with you. Conclude the whole matter here then:—

"No more, my God, I boast no more
Of all the duties I have done;
I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of thy Son."

Do not continue to say: "I do wish I could be a good, true Christian." There is

no satisfaction in so doing. But now say: "By the help of God's grace and Spirit, I will at once confess my Saviour and live for Him!"